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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the principles of an effective faculty evaluation system that are repeatedly recommended in the literature. These principles include the following: (1) clarify institutional goals; (2) decide on the purposes of the data to be collected; (3) use pilot programs when appropriate; (4) significantly involve participants in the development of the system; (5) foster open communication about the system; (6) obtain support from high-level administrators; (7) ensure that the system is flexible and legal; (8) define major and minor faculty responsibilities as well as the sources of data used to evaluate each subresponsibility at the beginning of the evaluation period; (9) use multiple data sources; (10) ensure that the data are technically acceptable; (11) define the criteria for each subresponsibility; (12) train the evaluators to evaluate and the supervisors to give feedback; (13) maintain confidentiality; (14) reward effective performance; (15) combine development with evaluation; and (16) review the system periodically. (Contains 30 references.) (CK)

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Developing an Effective Faculty Evaluation System

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> Those striving for perfection in these [faculty evaluation] systems may be on a collision course with disappointment. Or they may have a more subtle, Machiavellian motive, calling for a degree of perfection that they know can never be achieved in order to sabotage the whole effort.
>
> (Miller, 1987, pp. 26-27)

Since the early 1970s a substantial literature has developed about faculty evaluation. Two excellent books have been published in the last two years. The first published was *Reflective Faculty Evaluation: Enhancing Teaching and Determining Faculty Effectiveness* by Centra (1993); it was an extensive updating of his *Determining Faculty Effectiveness* (Centra, 1979). The second was *Assessing Faculty Work: Enhancing Individual and Institutional Performance* by Braskamp and Ory (1994) which represented a significant expansion of their earlier book, *Evaluating Teaching Effectiveness* (Braskamp, Brandenburg, & Ory, 1984) that only dealt with evaluating teaching.

Other major contributions to the literature that require mention were written by Miller and by Seldin. Miller's 1987 *Evaluating Faculty for Promotion and Tenure* was proceeded by two books written by him in the early 1970s, *Evaluating Faculty Performance* (1972) and *Developing Programs for Faculty Evaluation* (1974). Seldin's *Successful Faculty Evaluation Programs* (1980) was followed by *Changing Practices in Faculty Evaluation* (1984) and *Evaluating and Developing Administrative Performance* (1988). Each of these books cites many other books and articles on faculty evaluation.

The point of this flurry of citations is this, as one reads the different authors, one is struck by the high degree of agreement among them. I would suggest that among those knowledgeable of the literature and experienced in the field, there is 80 to 90 percent agreement about the general principles that should guide effective faculty evaluation. The answers to the important questions are known, although not necessarily on every campus.

The higher education rhetoric is almost universal in stating that the primary purpose of faculty evaluation is to help faculty improve their performance. However, an examination of the systems—as used—indicates that the primary purpose is almost always to make personnel decisions. That is, to make decisions for retention, promotion, tenure, and salary increases (summative evaluation). Summative evaluation is both legitimate and necessary, and can serve to improve the institution. *However, it does not necessarily help the individual faculty member improve (formative evaluation or development).*

Because every college and university makes personnel decisions, that is the primary focus of this paper. I will suggest 20 principles or steps in an effective faculty evaluation system that are repeatedly recommended in the literature.

1. **The institution—and the units within the institution—must develop *clear* goals.** Without criteria, evaluation is impossible. But criteria require a context. The basic context for evaluating faculty is the mission or goals of the institution. These inform the goals of the subunits—e.g., colleges within a university—all the way down to the foundation units, the department or division. This does not mean that there should be a single—monolithic—set of goals. Colleges vary, academic fields vary, departments vary, faculty vary, but the general context should be the mission and goals of the whole institution. (See Braskamp and Ory, 1994; and Diamond and Adam, 1993, for elaborations.)

Unfortunately at most institutions the goals are implicit. Even more unfortunately, one often finds significant disagreement across various departments and their faculty about what the institution should be doing. For example, at many research universities not all departments offer the doctorate; some may only offer the bachelor's, especially if there are satellite campuses. However, it is not unusual for the criteria for promotion to be constructed as though *every* faculty member was in a *doctorate-granting* department. One interpretation of such an approach is that this university should *not* be offering undergraduate courses. If that were really true, then the institution should stop offering undergraduate courses. However, it is rarely true. Therefore, everyone in the institution needs to be clear that part of the institution's mission is to educate undergraduates, *and* quality undergraduate teaching must be recognized by the criteria and rewarded.

2. **Decide on the purpose(s) data will be used for *before* any data are collected.** Every institution makes **personnel decisions**. Even if there is *no* rank (therefore no **promotion**), and no **tenure**, and across the board raises (therefore no merit pay, i.e. individual decisions about **salary increases**), at least the institution needs to decide about **retention**. So one purpose of collecting data about faculty is always summative evaluation—making personnel decisions.

However, if we go to the trouble to collect data—hopefully accurate data—then why not also use (some of) it for **faculty improvement** (formative evaluation). We say that we are primarily interested in improvement. But ask yourself, if faculty decided today that they wanted to improve their performance, **what kind of systematic help is available *from your institution*?** Most often it is to talk with the department head. Department heads can be very helpful, but on most campuses they also make personnel decisions—a potentially serious conflict in roles. Ideally there should be one or more **instructional consultants** or **master teachers** on campus who are available to the faculty and have *zero input into personnel decisions*. Relatively few campuses offer such support. Some campuses provide, or offer, **mentors** for some faculty. Sometimes **workshops** are offered on selected topics. Simply **talking with a colleague** can be very helpful, but if you need substantive (time-consuming) help, you are really imposing on your colleague because such help is rarely taken into consideration by faculty evaluation systems unless it is an *assigned* responsibility. Similarly, faculty development committees—that have no release time—do *not* represent significant *institutional* contribution to faculty development (although they may represent a significant *personal* contribution on the part of the committee members).

Faculty evaluation data are rarely used for the purpose of **student advisement**, i.e., to provide data to help students choose instructors or courses, although this is a perfectly legitimate use of the data. Faculty evaluation data can also be used for **institutional development**, and for **research**, both legitimate but infrequent uses of the data.

The primary reason the purposes or uses of the data must be decided upon *before* any data are collected is *justice*; it is unfair to collect data without everyone knowing who will receive what information for what purposes, because such knowledge can influence the responses of students and of others. When the rules of the game are known beforehand, the system is more likely to be accepted by the faculty, and also be more defensible if it goes to court (assuming that the rules have been followed).

3. **Use pilot programs when *appropriate*.** This is *not* discussed much in the faculty evaluation literature, but is emphasized in the educational change literature at least as far back as the 1970s (Lindquist, 1978). Say you are considering introducing a significant change into your evaluation system, e.g., using teaching portfolios for evaluation or peers rating course materials. Organizations have a tendency to want to invent everything at home. Even if it were possible, it would be grossly inefficient. You would be well advised to contact several institutions *similar to your own* and find out how they do it. However, there comes a time when you need *your own* experience, but *not* with everyone.

Decide on the first approximation of your proposed program, then obtain volunteers. The volunteers should be representative of the groups that will eventually participate if the program is adopted. Let the volunteers make suggestions about the program, then run the pilot. After the pilot, those running it and the volunteers should discuss the experience. You may have enough information to decide you do *not* want to make the procedure part of your evaluation system. Quite often you will decide that you need to make revisions and run a second pilot. Occasionally you will decide that with minor revisions the procedure could be adopted. In that case you can propose the procedure to the entire group of potential participants for discussion. One very important point, **the data collected during the pilot(s) should *not* be used for evaluation**. That means that during the pilot(s) you will need to collect *double* data on the volunteers.

4. ***Significantly* involve participants—especially campus leaders—in the development of the system.** The primary reason for this involvement is **acceptance** and **ownership**. Involving the leaders among the faculty helps to make the evaluation system the *faculty's* system, not just the administration's. To the extent possible, involve all of the faculty and other constituencies, e.g., students, trustees. If you want human beings to actively and constructively implement a system, give them a significant say in its development. Doing so is also likely to lead to receiving some useful suggestions. (See Farmer, 1990, for some elaborations.)

5. **Foster *extensive, open* communication before, during, and after the adoption of the system.** For some task-oriented (vs. people-oriented) administrators—and faculty—spending all that time talking about what you should do seems a terrible waste of time. If you have a good idea, do it. But faculty evaluation is far more than a *cognitive* process; it is an *affective* one. It is about **changing attitudes, values, traditions, and their attendant emotions**. Any change in your faculty evaluation system will require what Bennis, et al. (1976) called a **normative-reeducative strategy**. You not only have to change ideas, you have to change feelings. And discussion helps change feelings. An empirical-rational strategy—simply having a good idea—is not enough. A power-coercive strategy—trying to force the faculty to accept a position—is positively counterproductive. "Wasting time" in talking out the proposed changes may be one of the most productive things you can do!

6. **Obtain support for the development of the system from high-level administrators.** Leadership from the bottom is notoriously inefficient, and usually ineffective. If the top-level administrator(s) do(es) not support a proposed improvement, no matter how excellent the change may be, forget it. You will not be able to make a substantive improvement.

7. **Ensure that the system is flexible.** This is extremely important. Any system of faculty evaluation needs to be concerned about fairness, which often translates into a concern about comparability. The most obvious solution to the comparability problem is to use the *same system for everyone*. **Using the same evaluation system for everyone almost guarantees that it will be *unfair to everyone*.** Therefore, each department/division/academic unit should have documents that describe and give examples of how the institution's evaluation system applies to the characteristics and circumstances of that unit and its faculty.

Not all departments have the same mission in the institution, e.g., they may not offer the same degrees. So the weight given to research can vary. Even if departments offer the same degrees, fields differ. In some fields research usually means a book, in others a journal article, in still others a creative work. In some fields publication in some refereed journals counts for more than in other refereed journals. Acceptable teaching loads vary. How does a lecture compare with a lab or with giving individual music instruction? Each department needs to spell this out so when people *from other fields* are evaluating someone for promotion or tenure, they have some understanding of what is applicable in that field and *not* use the criteria from their own field.

The development of such documents usually takes a few years, and multiple iterations, because after the department has developed a first approximation of their criteria, the unit above—the college or university—must react. Even after every level seems to have approved the department's system in the abstract, when a real case comes up, disagreements are often discovered. If at all possible, I suggest that after agreement in the abstract is reached, some case studies be evaluated by representatives of the different levels to see what disagreements or differences in interpretation still remain.

8. **Ensure that the system is legal.** This is a complex topic that I will not even attempt to address, other than to say, consult with your institution's attorney. And probably consult with another attorney because attorneys do not always agree. Centra (1993) has a chapter on "Legal Considerations in Faculty Evaluation." Braskamp and Ory (1994) have some pages on "Legal Principles." For a reference on general legal questions, see Kaplin and Lee's (1995) *The Law of Higher Education*.

9. **Define *major* faculty responsibilities at the *beginning* of the evaluation period.** The traditional faculty responsibilities are teaching, research, and service. I suggest that we add advising (of students *not* in one's courses) as a separate responsibility because it is important and should be rewarded. Advising is important because when done effectively it can significantly enhance the student's educational experience; it also helps to retain students.

Service deserves much greater weight than it typically receives. Effective committee work related to a department's introductory course(s), or to the program for majors, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of the instructional program. In some fields, e.g., education and nursing, where there is significant supervision of students off campus, service responsibilities can become a major portion of a faculty member's load.

In some fields there may be a *unique* area of responsibility. How many fields would consider international activities important enough to be a separate category? (Not many.) However, in many departments of agricultural economics there is enough consulting overseas that it deserves to be a separate responsibility.

There are two other areas that are not treated in much detail in the literature, but which deserve greater consideration: professional competence and professional behavior. I suggest that these should form the foundation for all of the faculty responsibilities discussed above. They have always been included *implicitly*. AAUP (1990) has listed subject matter mastery and moral turpitude for decades. **Professional competence** not only includes **degrees earned**, but in some fields **licenses** (e.g., nursing) or **certificates** (e.g., the CPA in accounting). In almost every field, **previous experience and special training** impact competence (e.g., post-doctoral fellowships). Usually much of this information is available in the faculty member's personnel file.

Professional behavior is beginning to receive more explicit consideration (e.g., Dill, 1982; Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992). Professional behavior would include things like **ethical behavior related to teaching and research** (AAUP, 1990; APA, 1992; Braxton, 1994; CAS, 1988; Svinicki, 1994; Tabachnick, et al., 1992). Other relevant areas are ***non*-sexist/*non*-racist behavior** (Riggs, et al., 1993), ***non*-substance abuse**, and **legal behavior** (e.g., is conviction of a felony grounds for dismissal at your institution?). Another area of concern is **collegiality.** Especially in small departments, an uncooperative, abrasive colleague can have a significant negative impact on the department's effectiveness. The question is not whether it is reasonable to consider collegiality, but how to measure it in an accurate and unbiased way. Simply asking every faculty member to rate every other faculty member of collegiality is *not* sufficient. The School of Agriculture at Tennessee Technological University has made a useful beginning. Their "Tenure-Track Review Ballot" lists specific collegial behaviors that are to be rated. Other possibly relevant behaviors relate to **commitment to the values of the institution** (e.g., at church-related institutions), **relationship to authority**, and **interpersonal relationships** (e.g., romantic relationships).

A serious reservation about making professional behavior a *regular* part of an institution's faculty evaluation procedures is that in practice only *negative* behaviors would likely be used. It would be difficult, for example, for a faculty member to demonstrate that he or she was especially ethical in the classroom. However, including a general discussion on the expectation of professional behavior in the faculty handbook may be worthwhile just to make it explicit. Some faculty from some cultures may honestly have different concepts of what is acceptable behavior.

10. **Define faculty *sub*responsibilities at the beginning of the evaluation period and determine their weighting.** Simply to list teaching or research is not sufficient. In IDEA Paper No. 21 (Cashin, 1989) I suggested that there were seven aspects to teaching: subject matter mastery, curriculum development, course design, delivery of instruction, assessment of learning, availability to students, and administrative requirements. (Students know little or nothing about some of these.) Regarding research, Sundre (1992) lists 249 possible attributes of scholarship. Pellino, et al. (1984) identified six dimensions of scholarship: professional activity, research (publishing), teaching, service, artistic endeavor, and "engagement with the novel." Service and advising may involve more than what is typically found on the institution's "Annual Faculty Activities Form." Given the wide variation among academic fields and different departments, each unit must detail what is considered to be teaching, etc. when evaluating their faculty.

Not only should the subresponsibilities be defined qualitatively, but it is also highly desirable to decide on their weighting. First decide whether teaching, research, etc. should all count equally. (Usually not.) Then, for example, will delivery of instruction be weighted as much as, say, administrative requirements? (Rarely.) Will you use the same weightings for all faculty? (I hope not.) A typical approach is for the department to decide a range for each responsibility, e.g., service can vary from 10% to 40%. Then individual faculty members negotiate their effort within the department's guidelines. It is the chairperson's responsibility to insure that the total mix agreed upon covers all of the department's goals. Thus, typically two or more meetings with faculty are required. Arreola (1995) details a weighting system using examples from teaching. Tucker (1984) describes a point system for faculty evaluation that implies a weighting of importance for different activities.

11. **Define the sources of data to be used to evaluate each subresponsibility at the *beginning* of the evaluation period.** This is not as straightforward as it might seem. It is not enough to decide that students are going to be one source of data used to evaluate teaching. You must decide whether you are going to use student ratings and/or student's comments to open-ended questions, or interview data from a small-group instructional diagnosis conducted during the course, or interview data from graduating majors, or solicited or unsolicited letters from students, or the complaints of students, etc. Given that you are going to use student ratings, do you need ratings from all of the classes taught or only a sample? Will you use the responses to all of the items or only selected ones? Will you use ratings if only half the students enrolled completed them? These decisions should be made *before any data are collected* and *all of the faculty involved* should have had the opportunity to provide feedback.

12. **Use *multiple* sources of data.** Because all of the data are imperfect, and usually statistically unreliable, many sources of data must be used for an accurate evaluation, not just department head's data (impressions). I would suggest that there is no such thing as "objective" data to be used for evaluation. All of the data involve someone's opinion or someone's judgment: the students, colleagues, administrators. However, this does *not* mean that these opinions cannot be *informed* opinions. Even something like grant dollars that one might think were certainly objective involve someone's judgment that it is appropriate to count dollars because grant funds are not equally available in all fields.

As a corollary, I would strongly recommend that departments initially make a *tentative* decision, i.e., based on the present data this is what is recommended. This tentative decision and its basis should be communicated to the faculty member so that he or she could correct mistakes or add relevant information. Adapting such a procedure can make the data more reliable and valid, and the decisions more acceptable.

13. **Ensure that the data/measures are *technically* acceptable, i.e., are reliable and valid.** Although each kind of data or measure, taken separately, may be unreliable, when the combined data from several different sources agree, one has statistically reliable data. When they do *not* agree, if at all possible, obtain more data. Since there is no agreed upon definition of effective teaching, or of effective research, or service, or advising, it is impossible to prove the validity of any of our measures except their face validity. That is, the data appear to be consistent with, for example, effective teaching. Only a few studies have attempted to research the validity of multiple sources of data (e.g., Marsh, 1982).

14. ***Specifically* define the criteria and the standards for each subresponsibility.** Typically faculty handbooks will talk about teaching, research, and service as faculty responsibilities, and then state the supposed **criteria**, for promotion "excellence" is required in two areas, and "quality" in the third. But what is the **standard**, what kind of student ratings, for example, does one need to be considered an excellent teacher? If I teach four courses and the student rating form uses a 5-point scale (so a "3" *might* be considered a "C"—acceptable), and if I have C's in two courses, and an A in the third, is it acceptable for me to have an F in the fourth? I would still have a C-average. Or is there some kind of critical cutoff; an F is unacceptable even with three A's. Averages have their limitations. How would you evaluate a surgeon who had all A's except for a D in eye-hand coordination? Specifying the standards is what is most lacking in faculty evaluation systems, probably because they are the most difficult to agree upon. Done right, the task will require several iterations over years, but without some kind of definition of criteria and standards, faculty evaluation is not only subjective, but often arbitrary and capricious.

15. **Train the evaluators to evaluate.** This is frequently recommended; infrequently done. What the literature is recommending is that everyone who supplies data to be used in evaluation receive some kind of training. So, for example, instructors could discuss the meaning of student rating items with students. Peers rating course materials could practice by rating case studies, first independently, then discussing them in groups. Similarly, administrators—or others—could view videotapes of classes and rate them as they would for a classroom observation. Or complete portfolios could be evaluated by anyone who would have that responsibility.

16. **Train the supervisors in giving feedback.** Role playing the annual performance appraisal is perhaps the best way to provide such training. An administrator—evaluator—may feel very confident of the accuracy of his or her judgment about a faculty member's performance. But try communicating that judgment to the faculty member in a *constructive* way. The role playing of case studies can be very educational (even if unpleasant). One approach is to have the supervisors split into groups of three. One person plays the supervisor, another the faculty member, and the third observes. After the role play ends, the observer gives feedback to the supervisor and everyone talks about their reactions to the experience. The training requires three iterations so that everyone experiences all three of the roles.

17. **Maintain *appropriate* confidentiality.** On most campuses the faculty handbook, or other statement of institutional policy, indicates that deliberations concerning personnel decisions are to be kept confidential (although occasionally state "sunshine" laws will include personnel decisions). Faculty and administrators should take such confidentiality as a very serious professional and ethical obligation. However, despite institutional policies requiring confidentiality, everyone should be aware that if the faculty member can make a case that there has been discrimination, the courts may require disclosure. (See the U. S. Supreme Court decision, *University of Pennsylvania v. EEOC*, 110 S. Ct. 577 (1990).)

18. **Reward *effective* performance.** For a faculty evaluation system to be effective, i.e., to impact faculty behavior, first, *accurate* discriminations must be made about the performance of different faculty members; second, the faculty must *perceive* that the discriminations are accurate; and third, based on those discriminations effective *faculty must be treated differently* from ineffective ones. On campuses with across the board raises—which are basically pass/fail systems—the third condition is usually lacking. Why bother to make fine discriminations if you are only going to put people into two categories, or on many campuses really only one—because everyone usually passes.

19. ***Combine* development with evaluation; have an *on-campus* consultant.** If an institution goes to the trouble of collecting accurate information about a faculty member's performance, why not use some of it to help the individual improve. Although the kind of data needed for evaluation differs some from that needed for improvement, there can be considerable overlap. Institutions say they want to help faculty improve but often have little systematic help available for anyone who wants to improve. The ideal situation *for development* is to have someone from the faculty with assigned responsibility to help faculty improve. This does not require a large center or office; releasing a faculty member—whom the other faculty trust—from one course a term, or from part of their research obligation, etc., plus a modest budget, is a useful beginning. Then let experience determine the rate of growth.

20. **Review the system *periodically*.** Nothing conceived by human beings will ever be perfect, especially something as complex and sensitive as faculty evaluation. Initially, if you are making major changes in your evaluation system, you should review it every year. Eventually you need only review the system every three to five years. The system should be viewed as organic and dynamic. It will need to grow and change, if only because circumstances change, but more importantly to become better.

Conclusion. As you have probably already concluded, developing an effective faculty evaluation system is time consuming. This cuts both ways. Occasionally I will hear of a campus where the board of trustees has given the institution three or six months to make major changes in their evaluation system, e.g., moving to a merit-pay system or changing to universal use of teaching portfolios. To change that quickly almost guarantees a poor result. The process is not just a cognitive one, changing ideas; it is a normative-reeducative one, changing values and attitudes. For a system to be effective—to really change faculty behavior—it needs to be accepted by the faculty. It must be owned by them. Acceptance and ownership require a lot of time consuming discussion, but hopefully you are building a system of some permanence, not just something to use until the next change in administration. On the other hand, if you have a reasonably effective evaluation system in place and the board gives you several months to make it explicit, start now because it will take two or three times longer than you plan.

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